

WMA SPOTLIGHT

OLD RIVER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA



American alligator / Chris Spier

AREA SIZE

15,091 acres



LOCATION

Old River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a 15,091-acre area owned by Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) in Pearl River County. Located approximately 15 miles west of Poplarville and 15 miles north of Pica-yune, it is bordered by the Pearl River to the west and Highway 43 to the east.

HISTORY

The WMA was purchased in 1981 and was previously owned by Saint Regis Paper Company and The Nature Conservancy. Old River, an old Pearl River channel, flows through the WMA. A small portion on the southern end is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

LAY OF THE LAND

The WMA includes approximately 23 miles of Pearl River frontage. It contains a diverse mix of habitats, including mixed pine-hardwood forests, bottomland hardwoods, and cypress-lined oxbow lakes. A network of sloughs and channels traverse the area, allowing access to much of the property when water levels allow. Numerous lakes, sloughs, and flooded bottomland hardwood wetlands provide foraging and roosting habitat for migrating waterfowl. Major flooding occurs in bottomland hardwood areas following periods of heavy rain or backwater flooding from the Pearl River. Horseshoe Lake, an oxbow of the Pearl River, is accessible from Highway 26, a short distance from the Louisiana border. All-terrain vehicle trails allow access to Chinquapin Creek from Highway 26 and to the Pearl River from the designated camping area.

Few timber harvesting activities took place on the land before Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and much of the area consisted of mature, closed-canopy hardwood forests. After Katrina, MDWFP personnel prepared an emergency timber sale to al-

low timber salvage operations. Loggers removed downed and damaged merchantable timber from accessible areas across the WMA. The hurricane, combined with salvage logging operations, created expansive openings.

Invasive plant species are a serious threat to wildlife habitat across south Mississippi, and Old River WMA is no exception. Invasive species outcompete native plant and tree species and provide little to no wildlife value. The primary invasive species occurring on the Old River WMA are cogon grass and Chinese tallow trees.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Old River provides a diversity of habitat for many game and non-game wildlife species. Game species occurring on the WMA include white-tailed deer, turkey, woodcock, squirrel, rabbit, and waterfowl. The area is also home to a healthy population of alligators that provides hunting opportunities for those drawn during the public waters season. Anglers enjoy good-to-excellent opportunities for catfish, largemouth bass, crappie, and bream on the streams and oxbows that cover the area. The area is also productive for catching crawfish.

Other activities include bird watching, hiking, and horseback riding. The area is part of the Mississippi Coastal Birding Trail and serves as a major resource for migratory species. The great diversity of wildlife also provides many other wildlife viewing opportunities. Only a few roads are open and accessible by vehicle. Many visitors access the WMA by boat. A designated camping area is located off Albert Prince Road.



Prothonotary warbler / Chris Spier



ARCHNEMESIS

Cogongrass affects pine productivity and survival, wildlife habitat, recreation, native plants, fire behavior, site management costs, and more.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visitors to all WMAs should be familiar with the current regulations, including license a harvest reporting requirements, as well as the check-in and check-out processes. Certain seasons and areas are closed during flooding. Unless exempt from purchasing an annual hunting or fishing license, all visitors must possess a valid WMA-user permit if utilizing the area. To learn more about Old River WMA, visit www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/wma or call (601) 432-2199.

Colt Mooney and Blake Stefano are Conservation Associate Biologists for MDWFP.